

Shoulda, Coulda, Woulda

Imagine that you get roped into writing an inclement-weather policy for your company. How do you distinguish between rules cast in stone and areas where employees can use their own judgment? This issue of *KB CommEntary* examines the words that can help you make it all clear.

What's Up at KB COMM?

At KB COMM, we provide mission-critical communication and learning services to clients in a variety of industries. Thanks to our established and new clients for keeping us busy. Recent and ongoing projects include:

- Writing and editing numerous information products for a healthcare diagnostics manufacturer, including employee communications, customer presentations and letters, product marketing brochures and data sheets, and training materials
- Writing and editing marketing and employee communications for an academic research organization
- Formatting and revising technical reports and manufacturing standard operating procedures, work instructions, forms, logbooks, and batch records for a pharmaceutical company
- Coordinating document preparation and approval for manufacturing of a new pharmaceutical product
- Drafting, reviewing, and editing for consistency and accuracy response documents and associated modules for electronic submission to health authorities on behalf of pharmaceutical companies

KB COMM LLC is a certified Women's Business Enterprise. We are officially qualified to participate in corporations' woman- and minority-owned vendor programs.

Please keep us in mind for your communication or training projects.

Tips and Tales

Do It or Else...

Many business, technical, and scientific communications are devoted to policies, procedures, standards, recommendations, and guidelines: things that people comprising various roles and audiences are expected to do. One crucial element of all these directives is the degree or extent to which their prescriptions must be followed. Is this step mandatory or optional? Is it necessary to complete this task without exception, or are there circumstances in which it can be bypassed? Should you regard this guidance as a good idea, preferred practice, or absolutely essential edict?

A handful of short, seemingly innocuous verbs make all the difference in these kinds of communications. We can categorize their intent as *mandatory* (imperative), *recommended*, and *optional*.

Mandatory: must, will, shall

These are the *do-it-or-else* verbs. Use them when something absolutely, positively must be done—no exceptions, no fooling around. Of these, *must* sounds stronger, but they all denote that the stated action is imperative.

Recommended: should

Use *should* to indicate that something is a preferred practice but not absolutely mandatory. There are or could be acceptable alternatives to the stated action, but if you could do it this way, yeah, that would be great (if you want that promotion).

Optional: can, could, may, might

Use these verbs to indicate that the stated action, while a good idea (else why would you be mentioning it?), is ultimately optional.

Organizations that create numerous policy and procedure documents often have their own detailed standards regarding what these verbs mean and how they are to be used. For example, *must*, *will*, and *shall* could mean distinctly different things in certain kinds of documents produced by Company A, or *should* could fall into the Mandatory category at Company B. If your enterprise has such standards, please follow them scrupulously.

And please remember, *when it has to be right*, KB COMM is here to help.

Sincerely,

Kathy

Kathy Breuninger

KB COMM

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